



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 110th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 153

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2007

No. 148

House of Representatives

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. COHEN).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
October 2, 2007.

I hereby appoint the Honorable STEVE COHEN to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 25 minutes and each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 9:50 a.m.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. ISSA) for 5 minutes.

WAR IN IRAQ

Mr. ISSA. Mr. Speaker, today in the Committee on Oversight and Reform, we are going to continue without a doubt the attack on our men and women in uniform. It is clear after last week's debate in which 79 Members of the House refused to denounce MoveOn.org for their attacks on the patriotism of General David Petraeus, there are those who intend to continue to attack the war on any front.

Mr. Speaker, I rise not because I support the war, not because I love war,

not because in fact I have any desire to have this war or any war last one day longer than absolutely necessary.

Mr. Speaker, unable to effectively portray our men and women in uniform as guilty of wrongdoing, in spite of the fact that one of our Members called in fact our marines, marines based at Camp Pendleton, killers of women and children in cold blood. Those charges for the most part have already been dismissed.

Our men and women in uniform make mistakes. In the Committee on Oversight and Reform today, we are going to be talking about not our men and women in uniform, but men and women who served an average of 10 years in uniform who have joined private contractors in support of our State Department. Specifically, Mr. Speaker, I am talking about Blackwater. I am not defending Blackwater. The truth is neither Speaker PELOSI nor Chairman WAXMAN know what happened in Iraq in September. What we do know is that there are investigations going on into the specific incidents, like so many incidents in a country in which every day soldiers, sailors and marines die by IEDs and roadside bombs and other ways of killing our men and women without taking risk to their own lives.

An incident like that apparently occurred in September, but instead of waiting until the IG, the FBI, the State Department concluded their investigations, today, Mr. Speaker, the Government Oversight and Reform will decide that they are going to go after the facts directly. They have subpoenaed directly the CEO of that company, not because he was there, not because he has some special knowledge, but because, Mr. Speaker, it is all about the headlines. The bodies were not even cold on that incident before the Committee on Oversight and Reform began to prepare for today's hearings.

In order to believe that Blackwater is guilty before the evidence is in, you

have to believe the Minister of Interior. Mr. Speaker, you have to believe the very organization that former Washington, DC, Chief Ramsey and retired four star General Jim Jones called that organization that he leads, some 300,000 police, 85 percent of whom are Shia, so corrupted and so compromised as to be disbanded. In fact, that is exactly the organization that apparently arrived and apparently is to be believed that some wrongdoing occurred.

Mr. Speaker, when I went to Iraq the last time or one time, I went with Chairman WAXMAN and now Speaker PELOSI, our unit was guarded by Blackwater. At that time, I didn't hear any objections to the overhead cover provided by Blackwater. I didn't hear any objections to the EOD unit that was protecting us against bombs. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the only time there seems to be a desire to have this type of oversight is when the headlines would help demean the very effort we are involved in in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, I trust that the American people are in fact more knowledgeable of what this war is all about. Not that they want this war, but that they do not want to have the men and women in uniform or those Americans who under contract go to this combat zone willingly, most of them after service in that combat zone while in uniform, demeaned without a fair opportunity for investigation.

Mr. Speaker, I was one of many Members of Congress who asked that today's hearing be postponed until at least the State Department, the FBI, and other organizations had an opportunity to do a proper investigation. I am proud to be a ranking member on the Subcommittee on Oversight and Reform, but I am ashamed that we in fact are doing trials rather than oversight. We have never done anything more shameless than what we are doing today, going after an organization without waiting for the facts. We

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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do not oversee Blackwater in the Congress; we oversee the administration, and we should be looking at their reports, we should be looking at what they have done, and we should be in fact reforming anything that is wrong in the administration.

So I trust that today's hearings will be watched by many people, Mr. Speaker. I trust that Members of this body will view this as what it is, a witch hunt, because they can't go after our men and women in uniform.

ACKNOWLEDGING IRAQIS AT RISK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 4, 2007, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) is recognized during morning-hour debate for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, there is fierce debate and dissension on this floor and in Congress and around the country about the war in Iraq. This disagreement runs deep. It is profound. I believe it to be sincere. But there is one thing that everybody will agree on regardless of whether they think this war is merited or not, regardless of whether they think it has been prosecuted in a reasonable and efficient manner or not. They can acknowledge the debt and obligation that the United States has to over 4 million Iraqis who have been forced to flee their homes. This is a humanitarian crisis that rivals Darfur. It is the worst ongoing humanitarian crisis in the world at this point.

Over 2 million Iraqis have fled their country. And while there is debate over the precise numbers these days, whether it is an additional 25,000 a month or 50,000 a month, whether it is going up or going down, no one disputes that they are still fleeing their homes by the thousands.

I first became involved with the problem of the Iraqis who are at risk because they help the United States, guides and translators, when I started working with a group of high school students in Portland, Oregon, at Lincoln High School, who were working in turn with some Oregon National Guard members who had returned to Oregon but were trying desperately to save the life of a young woman who had served as their translator. Because she had helped the Americans, she was targeted. She and her family were targeted by extremists. It took months. Time doesn't permit going through all the hurdles that we encountered. Luckily, that young woman is safely in the United States now going to college and she is no longer at risk, although afraid to show her face or to be identified specifically for fear that her family would in turn be targeted. I made a commitment to those young people in the high school and in the Oregon National Guard that we would work to introduce comprehensive legislation to make it easier to meet the obligation to those who took America at its word, who helped our brave soldiers, and who in turn now have their lives imperiled.

We have introduced comprehensive legislation that would increase the allowable number that could come, that would put somebody in charge of this responsibility, make it possible to actually be processed in country.

It is ironic that we have the largest embassy in the world in Baghdad, and yet the Iraqis have to leave the country to seek refugee status. They can't go to the green zone and this vast embassy. They have to leave the country in order to apply for asylum.

I frankly was encouraged that last week our colleagues in the Senate made important progress by passing an amendment to the Senate defense authorization bill that would start to address the crisis by including some of the elements in the comprehensive legislation that I have introduced. It is an important first step, but it is only a first step. It is time for the United States to do the right thing for these people whose lives are imperiled.

When we started this process at the beginning of the fiscal year, the United States was going to allow 7,000 people in the country. A small number, actually, by comparison to what little Sweden, for example, was willing to do, a country a fraction of our size, and they aren't the country who engineered this war nor are occupying Iraq. Well, in a few months that goal of 7,000 was reduced to 2,000. As the fiscal year ended this last weekend, we fell short even of that reduced goal: Only 1,600 of these Iraqi refugees were brought into this country.

Our failure to step up is having serious operational consequences. Ambassador Crocker in a memo that has been I suppose leaked but widely published, widely disseminated here in Washington, DC, points out that the failure to help these people who are helping us actually undermines the ability to have other guides and interpreters and people working with us. We risk leaving a legacy of despair, undermining our credibility in the Middle East, to say nothing of the thousands of people whose lives are at risk.

I urge my colleagues to join me in passing comprehensive legislation that will deal with this humanitarian crisis, at least for the people who are most at risk for having put their trust in the United States as they worked to help us.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until 10 a.m. today.

Accordingly (at 9 o'clock and 13 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess until 10 a.m.

□ 1000

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HOLDEN) at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer:

Divine teacher and source of ageless wisdom, keep within Your vision all students, teachers, school administrators, and providers from families, business and government who are engaged in education across this vast and varied land.

Fan into flame, Lord, the desire for knowledge and the ability to make good decisions in Your people of all ages. Help the young to use their energy and imagination in all intellectual pursuits. Guide committed students to adjust to the needs of our times and look beyond self-interest to serve the broader community with global perspective.

Confirm professionals and the elderly with educational opportunities which will draw upon their experience and offer greater wisdom.

May educational possibilities flourish in this Nation so that growth in technology, science and human understanding may create an exciting future for Your people and give You greater glory founded upon solid reasons for faith and love, both now and forever.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. PITTS) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. PITTS led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM

(Mr. COOPER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. COOPER. Mr. Speaker, President Bush, having vetoed fewer bills than almost any President in American history, is now talking about vetoing many bills. One of these is the children's health insurance bill, the so-called CHIP or SCHIP piece of legislation.

To veto this bill would be a big mistake. One reason is the Senate has already demonstrated it has the votes for an override, and I think in the House it's just a question of time until we have the votes to override.

But the key point is this: It's a good bill. And I don't say that lightly. I